

[Alice J. VanWinkel]

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Mrs. Alice J. VanWinkel.

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I was born in Carlinville, Illinois, August 26, 1857, in a three room log cabin, on my grandfather Bill Whitney's farm.

My mother was Mary Whitney. She was married to my father, John Collins, about the year 1855, in Carlinville Illinois. My maiden name was Alice J. Collins. I was married to John H. Shears in Carlinville, Illinois, in 1876. (I do not remember the date). We went to housekeeping in a two roomed log cabin on my grandfather's farm. My grandfather Whitney, on whose place we lived, raised corn, wheat and hogs.

My husband worked on the farm while we lived there. He took the corn and wheat to Litchfield Illinois, and had it ground into corn meal and flour. We killed our own hogs and cured all of our own meat, hams, shoulders and side meat. We had a garden and raised all of our vegetables. About the only things we bought were sugar and coffee.

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We made our own candles in tho'se days. I made mine out of mutton tallow and twisted twine string, and moulded them myself. I had my own moulds. Nobody had kerosene lamps in tho'se days.

My grandfather Whitney had some sheep on the farm and my grandmother Whitney washed the wool from the sheep, card and spun it, and would weave it into cloth to make our clothes. I never saw a calico dress until I was ten years old.

My husband and I lived on this farm for about two years. We then took a notion to go to Texas, so in September 1878, we left Carlinville, Illinois, in two covered wagons, drawn by 2 two horses to each wagon. We had five head of horses and led the extra horse.

My husband drove one wagon and I drove one. We had our chuck box in the back of one of the wagons and kept our dishes and supplies in it. We had our own flour, corn meal and meat and bought the rest of our supplies. I did the cooking. I used a Dutch oven for baking and made hot biscuit and corn bread. We used Mesquite roots for fuel until we got on the plains in Texas and then we had to use buffalo chips.

We slept in one of the wagons. We had a pair of bed springs in the bottom of the wagon with our beds on that. We burned candles that I had made on the farm before we left.

We had our drinking water in water kegs tied on the side of one of the wagons. We always tried to drive to water each day for the horses.

We enjoyed camping out. We saw lots of antelope and coyotes. We did not have any trouble at all on the trip. I do not remember the names of any of the towns we passed thro'ugh. We had good weather and the country was beautiful all the way.

We were on the road just two months when we reached Weatherford, Texas, the last of October, 1878.

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We rented a two roomed lumber house in Weatherford, and my husband got a job plowing up prairie land. He used three horses to a fourteen inch plow. He made good money plowing for other people.

While we were living in Weatherford our first child, Minnie Irene, was born on June 6, 1879. We continued to live on in Weatherford Texas, until about the first of February, 1881.

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We left Texas then for New Mexico, with our two covered wagons, drawn by two horses to each wagon, the baby and I in one wagon and my husband in the other.

We started out with enough provisions to last us on the trip, except for fresh meat. My husband would kill a nice fat antelope and we would have plenty of meat for awhile. It was cold weather and the meat would keep for several days. We had lovely weather and no trouble on our trip.

At Midland, Texas, we picked up a young fellow by the name of Frank Jackson, who wanted to come to New Mexico, so we brought him along with us.

At that time all there was to the town of Midland, was a pump and a tank for the Texas and Pacific Railroad Company. There was a man there who took care of the pump. He lived in a ten foot lumber shack.

We left Midland and drove out about ten miles west, to a beautiful natural lake, with the prettiest clear water, and cotton wood trees all around the lake. We got there about noon and I began to cook dinner. My husband and Frank Jackson took their guns and said that they would go out to see if they could kill an antelope, as we needed fresh meat. I finished dinner and waited and waited for them to return, but they did not come. Just before it began to get dark I saw a string of horseback riders but they were too far away for me to see whether they were white men or Indians. I was just scared to death but they did not

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come by where we were camped. I rounded up the three remaining horses and put ropes on their necks and led them up to the back 4 of the wagon that we slept in, and tied them. I put my baby to bed and got a six shooter that my husband had in the wagon and I sat in the back of the wagon with the six shooter in my lap and the ropes that held the horses in my hands. I sat there all night. I was so afraid some one would slip up and steal the horses and I would be a-foot with my baby. I just could not imagine what had become of my husband and the young man, but just at day-break they came riding in. They had gone farther away from camp than they realized and when they started back they got lost and dark overtook them and they just wandered around all night long. When day light came they were about three hundred yards away from our camp. I was so glad to see them that I cried with joy.

The rest of the trip to Pecos City was very pleasant considering it was in winter time. We saw some live buffalo and lots of buffalo carcasses and hides that had been staked down to dry.

While crossing the plains we had to burn buffalo and cow chips altogether for fuel. When we came to a place where there were lots of chips we would gather them up, several tow-sacks full, and put them in the wagons, so that if we came to a place where there was no fuel, we would have something to burn.

When we got to the Pecos River, at Pecos City Texas, we had to cross on the railroad bridge, as the river was up too high for us to cross any other way.

We traveled almost due north, up the Pecos Valley and passed thro'ugh what is now Carlsbad. It was nothing but a cow ranch then.

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We arrived in Roswell, New Mexico, about the last of February, 1881, after having been on the road for six weeks. All there was of Roswell at that time were three adobe houses and

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a blacksmith shop, run by Fred Gayle. Captain J. C. [Lea?] owned the three houses, and he and his family lived in the largest and used part of it as a hotel.

We stayed in Roswell for about three days and then my husband got a job aa a ranch hand on the Phelps White ranch, on the Bosque Grande, about forty miles east of Roswell. We stayed on this ranch about two months.

We moved from this White ranch to Las Vegas, New Mexico, where we heard there was a big saw-mill. My husband bought six head of oxen and started hauling logs for the saw-mill. We did not like this country as well as we did Lincoln County, so about August 1, 1881, we sold out our oxen and moved book to Roswell, New Mexico, and stayed there until the next spring.

In the spring of 1882 my husband rented a small place in the Sacramento mountains, where we farmed and raised a few cattle. We lived in a two roomed log cabin. The nearest town was La Luz, New Mexico, where we got our mail. We did real well while we lived on this place. It was a beautiful country. We had no close neighbors and I was awfully scared of the Indians and my husband was away a good bit looking after the place.

In November, 1884, I went to Roswell for a few weeks and on the 22nd of November, 1884, our second child was born. He was a boy and we named him William Milan.

One night while I was alone with my two children, 6 I heard the dogs barking about midnight. I got up and got the six shooter and looked out the window and could see three dark objects prowling around the house. I went to the doors and windows to make sure they were all fastened tight. My husband had fixed our doors with two by four bars across them, when we first moved to this place because I was afraid to stay at night by myself. Pretty soon I heard somebody knock at the door, but I kept quiet and just let them knock. When I did not answer who ever it was tried to break down the door. That frightened me so badly that I asked what they wanted. A voice asked for some person that I had never heard of and I said there was nobody of that name there. Instead of going away they

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kept on trying to get in. I told them that the first person that came thro'ugh the door would certainly get shot. After finding that they could not get in they finally went away. I was very much frightened.

My husband tho'ught that it was some one trying to rob us as he had sold some cattle just a few days before and as there were no banks we kept the money in the house and we tho'ught they were after this money. When they rode awry I could see that they were three men but whether they were Mexican, Indian or Americans we never knew.

We had a pet deer while living on this place and one morning the deer and the children were playing out in the yard. All at once the deer came bounding into the house and jumped up on the bed. I knew at once that the deer was scared by something unusual so I stepped to the door to see where the children were. To my horror I saw five Indians all dressed up in their blankets and 7 war paint, coming towards the house. I stepped out in the yard to meet them for the children and I were all alone. The Indians knew that I was afraid of them for one of the Indians said to me: "Indians no hurt white squaw she give Indians something to eat." I was baking light bread that day so I went into the kitchen and got two loaves of bread and gave to them but they still wanted something. We had a half of mutton hanging up out in the [shed?] room and I decided I would give them a piece of it so they would leave. I went and got the butcher knife and went to the shed room to cut a piece of the mutton and when the Buck saw that I was going to give them just a piece of the meat, he grabbed the knife and if I had not turned it loose he would have pulled it thro'ugh my hand and cut my hand open. He laid the knife down and picked up the whole piece of meat and walked away. I did not say anything for I was only too glad to get rid of them.

In 1886 I went to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, and our third child was born on June 9, 1886. We named her Carrie.

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We lived on the place in the Sacramento mountains until the year 1890, and then moved back to Roswell. We did not stay there very long and then we moved to the Hondo River Valley, about twenty miles southeast of Lincoln, New Mexico. My husband worked at odd jobs on farms, plowing and planting for the farmers. We lived in the Hondo Valley until the late nineties, but I do not remember the exact date.

We moved to Arizona for my husband's health after we left the Hondo Valley. He was not able to work very much but did such odd jobs as he could. We lived in Douglas, Arizona, and 8 my husband, John H. Shears, died there on April 28, 1902.

My oldest daughter, Minnie, had been married before we went to Arizona, (I do not remember the exact date) and after my husband died I came back to Tinnie, New Mexico, to stay with my daughter, Minnie, and her husband, West [Purcells?], who lived at Tinnie on a ranch.

My son William Marlin Shears, married and he and his wife and little girl lived near there. One morning my son left home and we have never seen or heard of him since. That was in 1908, about thirty years ago. After he went away I took his little girl and raised her as my own.

In August, 1912, I was married to Jess Van Winkel. He owned a ranch on the east side of the Capitan Mountains where we lived until he died in February 1920. After Mr. Van Winkel's death I went to live with the grand-daughter whom I raised. Her name was Minnie Shears and she had married a man named Ernest [Purcells?]. I have lived with them for all these years as I am too old to live alone. They live on the old Torres place, about six miles northwest of Lincoln, New Mexico.

My daughter Minnie, who married West [Purcells?], had fifteen children, eleven of whom are still living. They still live at Tinnie, New Mexico.

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My youngest daughter, Carrie, married Sanford Backus, and they live at Roswell, New Mexico. I do not remember dates very well and I can't remember when they married.

NARRATOR: Mrs. Alice J. Van Winkel, Aged 82 years. Lincoln, N. Mex.